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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [EG](#)

SUBJECT: A NEW GOE APPROACH TO DEMONSTRATIONS?

REF: A. CAIRO 4024

[1](#)B. CAIRO 4005

Classified By: A/CDA Stuart Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: A July 30 anti-Mubarak rally in downtown Cairo was violently disbanded by Egyptian riot police and NDP "thugs," possibly including undercover security personnel. The tactics were reminiscent of events during the May 25 constitutional referendum (reftels), but on a much smaller scale. Two protesters suffered serious injuries and 31 demonstrators were either arrested or detained, and subsequently released. The Ministry of Interior reported that 15 riot policemen sustained injuries from stone-throwing demonstrators. What remains unclear is what sparked the GOE's violent response to the protest and whether the GOE has abandoned its permissive attitude towards political protests evident since the May 25 referendum. One explanation may be that the GOE is consciously moving to forestall any demonstrations during the election campaign. Charge will use a scheduled meeting with Minister of Interior El-Adly (for visiting CODEL King) to protest police actions against demonstrations. Embassy is also passing the message to NDP reformers that the GOE reaction and the inevitable Western media coverage do not bode well for the campaign season. End summary.

[1](#)3. (SBU) A loose coalition of about 250 demonstrators, led by Kifaya ("Enough") Movement leader George Ishaq, protested President Mubarak's presidential candidacy in downtown Cairo on the afternoon of July 30. Local and international media widely reported that security forces and NDP "thugs" violently confronted protesters and beat them with batons. Kifaya leader George Ishaq (detained and later released) reported that security forces detained and/or arrested at least 31 protesters, including Ayman Barakat, lawyer for al-Ghad party leader Ayman Nour, and Kifaya leaders Amin Eskandar and Hani Enan. Arrested protesters were taken to the Central Security station in El-Darasa. All 31 individuals had been released by the Ministry of Interior (MOI) by the afternoon of August 2, although two dozen face charges of raising banners promoting public disorder and contempt of the regime, assaulting policemen, destroying public property, participating in an unauthorized demonstration, and possessing "illegal" publications.

[1](#)4. (SBU) The MOI publicly justified its response by claiming that not only was the demonstration unauthorized, but that demonstrators had provoked the violence by throwing stones at police and disobeying warnings to disband. MOI further claimed that 15 of its own were injured in the clashes. For their part, the demonstrators denied throwing stones and said that even though they demonstrated without a permit, the MOI has allowed unauthorized demonstrations in the past. It remained unclear, however, whether demonstrators took a more aggressive approach, and if so, whether stones were thrown in response to an MOI onslaught or whether MOI and its supporters forcefully responded to the stone-throwers.

[1](#)5. (C) Comment: This confrontation comes in direct contrast to the "hands off" tactics adopted by the police towards demonstrators since the May 25 violence. Numerous, unauthorized demonstrations, including the large and vociferous demonstration during the June 28 opening of the Ayman Nour trial, have seen the security forces take a disciplined, observer role. The July 30 events may reflect a conscious decision by the authorities to crack down on demonstrations during the campaign season. The Government may argue that it cannot let protests by any party mar the campaign process. However, the brutal scenes on July 30 were clearly unacceptable. Charge will protest police actions against demonstrations with MOI chief Adly at a previously scheduled meeting on August 4, and the Embassy will raise with NDP reformers the extremely negative image generated from these events. End comment.

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JONES